



Alabama Cattlemen's Association

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2007 Farm Bill Forum U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns Tuskegee University

August 25, 2005
Comments from Eric Smith, Reform, AL
President-elect, Alabama Cattlemen's Association
PO Box 2499
Montgomery, AL 36102

Good afternoon Secretary Johanns and others.

My name is Eric Smith. I am a fulltime cattlemen and poultry producer from the Blackbelt region of Alabama and currently serve as president-elect of the Alabama Cattlemen's Association. The Blackbelt is a native grassland region bisected by the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. This region historically has suffered from high unemployment and a low economic base.

There have been numerous government commissions seeking ways to enhance the economic viability of our region without success. I maintain that enhancing cattle production and other areas of agriculture, like poultry, aquaculture, and other specialty crops is one of the best options for the Blackbelt.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today and want to especially thank you for coming to Alabama. The regulations your department administers can keep me in business or put me out of business. That's why I left our family farm today to participate in this important forum.

First let me personally thank you for your support of our national beef checkoff program. This self help producer assessment program has been beneficial to our cattle industry and to me personally. We are pleased that USDA worked hard to get a favorable ruling from the US Supreme Court on our checkoff program. Other commodity programs appreciate your support as well.

Two current USDA programs have been beneficial to the cattle producer and we encourage continued funding in these areas. These programs are EQIP (Environmental Quality Initiatives Program) and WHIP (Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program) both provides the economic

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incentives that enable us to implement programs to improve the quality of our environment and enhance wildlife habitat. Government can accomplish much by providing technology and cost-share funding that allows private land owners to make those improvements to their operation that will increase productivity while protecting our natural resources.

Along with my cows, I like many of my fellow cattle producers have a poultry operation. Properly disposing of poultry litter, especially in areas of concentrated poultry production is an increasing problem. Cattle producers can benefit from spreading poultry litter on pastures. We encourage USDA to increase funding for the Poultry Litter Disposal program that is under EQIP. High fuel costs make it difficult to transport litter to farms outside of the concentrated areas.

One popular program from the past Farm Bills – and I'm sure it's still on the burner for continuation - is the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Lots of land owners in my region like the program. But, as one who is working daily to make a living off the land, CRP hurts the economy of the Blackbelt. Over 25% of the open land in the dozen Blackbelt counties is tied up in CRP. This land is out of production and sits idle. The land owners- mostly absentee – get a government check – but our struggling economy receives no benefit. No one is running cattle on this land – buying fuel, feed, seed, fertilizer, farm equipment or paying labor. I suggest you take a deeper look at the impact this program is having on rural farm economies.

Agricultural producers are the most efficient in the world, producing the safest food at the lowest percent of disposable income in history. I, along with many of our Ag producers, am concerned that as the farm bill shifts toward more environmental programs, production agriculture will be forgotten. I have a genuine concern that some in our country would be pleased if production agriculture moved to South America. This would be a serious mistake and impact the security of our nation.

Mr. Secretary, it is a real honor for me to make these comments before you and this important forum. We are pleased that during the debate on the 2007 Farm Bill, we have a Secretary, the former Governor of Nebraska, who has a working knowledge of the beef cattle industry and a strong production agriculture background. Thank you.

Eric Smith, President-elect
Alabama Cattlemen's Association
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Montgomery, AL 36102



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2007 Farm Bill Forum

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns
Tuskegee University

August 25, 2005

Comments from Max Bozeman, Elba, AL
Vice President, Alabama Cattlemen's Association
PO Box 2499
Montgomery, AL 36102-2499

Mr. Secretary, I am Max Bozeman, a cow-calf producer from Elba, AL located in the Wiregrass region of the state. I currently serve as Vice President of the Alabama Cattlemen's Association, one of the largest state cattlemen's organizations in the country.

It is an honor for me to be here at historic Tuskegee University and be given the opportunity to speak at this Farm Bill Forum.

First, thank you Secretary Johanns for your diligent efforts and commitment to cattle producers on the international trade front and your work towards reopening of foreign borders to U.S. beef products. We also appreciate your handling of the BSE situation which helped maintain consumer confidence in our beef supply and kept our calf prices high.

Cattle are one of Alabama's largest farm commodities with over 25,000 beef cattle farms in the state. We sell over \$400 million dollars worth of cattle and calves annually.

Mr. Secretary I know first hand the impact of the farm bill as I use to grow peanuts and have now shifted totally to cattle. My comments today concern questions #2 and #4 from the material we received on the 2007 Farm Bill Forum.

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Those of us in production agriculture agree that future farm policy will most certainly require the co-existence of sustainable farming operations alongside delicate natural ecosystems. We also are aware that government working within the farm bill will most likely direct landowners to enact management practices to preserve and protect natural resources.

From my standpoint as a landowner and cattleman, I can see the benefit of a monetary incentive program that would make it more feasible for farmers to put such management practices into place on their own operations.

After all, cattlemen and other farmers are the nation's original land stewards and keeping our land productive for future generations remains a top priority. Today, 97% of cattlemen are family farmers and ranchers and 42% of those operations have been in the same family for more than 50 years.

I would like to see every effort made by USDA in the coming farm bill to include such incentives so as to make private landowners the driving force behind conservation efforts on private lands. It will be through the cooperation of USDA programs and the encouraged efforts of private landowners that farm policy can best achieve conservation and environmental goals.

My livelihood is dependent on being able to protect beef at a competitive price for a global marketplace. We need your help in keeping the playing field level in global trade and we need more dollars for our land grant universities to do agricultural research. I depend on our land grants to show me what improvements I can make in my cattle operation to keep abreast of the rapidly changing beef industry. Without their help, we will all be out of business.

We have a rapidly growing problem with non-native invasive plants such as Cogongrass, tropical soda apple, tallow trees, privet hedge, kudzu and other like species. The costs of spraying to keep these plants under control on large acreages are nearly prohibitive. More dollars are needed in cost-share programs for invasive plant eradication. This is the only way private land owner can play a major role in preventing these invasive plants from taking more of our farmland and forests out of production.

Although the price I received for my feeder calves this year was the highest ever, my input costs in diesel fuel, fertilizer and equipment were even higher. The 2007 farm bill must contain those items that will allow me to be able to produce more and more while operating on less and less. An example of an existing farm bill program that needs some change is the CRP which has taken a lot of land out of production in the name of conservation. As the farm bill shifts to conservation and environmental programs, cattle producers will play a more important role implementing management practices to help preserve and protect natural resources. If USDA helps me stay in the cattle business, I will plant the grass to conserve our soil and water as well as provide habitats for wildlife.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary for coming to Alabama and for listening to my comments.

Max Bozeman, Vice President
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